



MICHIGAN CHAPTER

February 28, 2012

To: Senators Thomas Caperson, Bert Johnson, Rabekah Warren and
Members of the Senate Transportation Committee

Re: **Senate Bills 909 & 911, proposing a Regional Transit Authority for SE Michigan**

My name is Anna Holden. I am a Detroit area resident and welcome the opportunity to present the Michigan Chapter of Sierra Club's comments on the proposed bills establishing a Regional Transit Authority for SE Michigan. We appreciate your taking time to consider our position on this legislation.

General Comments: Sierra Club supports a viable Regional Transit Authority in Southeast Michigan for many reasons, including the potential for reduced mobile automobile emissions. Mobile emissions, which are very high in Detroit and Wayne County along major roads and freeways, contribute to harmful health problems such as increased asthma attacks and other respiratory illnesses. We support many provisions of the proposed bills, but are asking you to consider several changes that would make the RTA more effective in the near future and on a long term basis.

Governance:

- (1) Membership of the RTA board should be more representative of transit ridership in the metro area. Because the highest number of riders will live in Detroit and the importance of coordinating RTA service with other transit lines in Detroit, the City of Detroit should have at least two representatives on the board.
- (2) RTA plans and operational decisions should be based on simple majority votes to avoid the stalemates and gridlock that will result from requiring 4/5 supermajority and unanimous votes on critical issues. Key planning decisions, e.g. special assessments to seek ballot issues for funding, support of rail transit, acquiring existing public transit agencies, and potential worker benefits are subject to these restrictions and will handicap the development of a viable regional system.

Funding:

- (1) We support SB 911 which provides options for funding regional transit by special county assessments or special vehicle registration fees dedicated to regional transit. We agree with provisions in the bills that these options must be passed by a majority vote in each county.
- (2) We agree with Transportation Riders United's position that the proposed mandate for 85% of funds raised by County special assessments or proposed motor vehicle fees should be used to best serve the region as a whole, not automatically mandated to the counties. This provision will limit the RTA's ability to provide improved transit where it is most needed.